THE INDISPENSABILITY AND IRREDUCIBILITY OF INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue against Michael Gorman's objection to Tim Crane's view of intentional objects. Gorman ("Talking about Intentional Objects," 2006), following Searle (*Intentionality*, 1983), argues that intentional content can be cashed out solely in terms of conditions of satisfaction. For Gorman, we have reason to prefer his more minimal satisfaction-condition approach to Crane's because we cannot understand Crane's notion of an intentional object when applied to non-existent objects. I argue that Gorman's criticism rests on a misunderstanding of Crane's position. I also discuss the importance of keeping track of the distinction between the intentional objects of intentional states and the referents of such states. I do agree with Gorman that conditions of satisfaction are needed to cash out *propositional* intentional content, but we cannot get these conditions of satisfaction right if we do not capture how the subject takes the world to be. And we cannot properly capture how the subject takes the world to be without commitment to intentional objects. I argue that Crane's notion of an intentional object is one that avoids questionable ontological commitments. So, in the end we have a view of intentional objects with a respectable metaphysics and ontology that can properly capture the intentional content of subjects' intentional states.

Tim Crane has defended the role of intentional objects in a correct theory of intentionality.[1] Here is a sketch of one argument he gives for the necessity of intentional objects.

> Thoughts about non-existent entities are distinct. A thought about Pegasus is distinct from a thought about Zeus. Talking about the objects of the thoughts allows us to distinguish thoughts about non-existent entities properly. Without intentional objects, we would not be able to explain what makes thoughts about distinct non-existent entities unique.

Michael Gorman (2006) disagrees, arguing that intentional objects are not needed in a complete theory of intentionality.[2] For Gorman, talk of intentional objects is completely reducible to talk about the truth conditions or conditions of satisfaction of intentional states (hereafter abbreviated as 'satisfaction conditions'). All that a theory of intentionality needs, according to him, is the notion of satisfaction conditions in order to make sense of intentional states, including intentional states about non-existent entities.

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Moreover, Gorman finds Crane's notion of an intentional object problematic. As a result, Gorman argues that philosophers should adopt a more minimal toolkit for analyzing intentionality than the one Crane offers, one that does not include intentional objects but merely satisfaction conditions. I agree with Gorman that we need satisfaction conditions in order to make sense of many intentional states.[3] However, we can get the satisfaction conditions right only if we maintain the notion of an intentional object; intentional objects cannot be reduced to the satisfaction conditions of intentional states because we need a notion of intentional objects that is independent of satisfaction conditions if we are to capture subjects' perspectives on the world accurately. Gorman says that a thought has the intentional object it does because of its satisfaction conditions, but this reverses the proper order of things. An intentional state has the satisfaction condition it does because of its intentional object. So, Gorman's idea that intentional objects are reducible to satisfaction conditions is mistaken.

The paper unfolds as follows. Sections I and II consist of stage setting. In section I, I discuss Crane's notion of a schematic intentional object. In section II, I explain the need to keep track of the distinction between the intentional object of an intentional state and the referent of an intentional state. In section III, I explain Gorman's criticism of Crane's view of intentional objects and respond to his criticism. In section IV, I lay out Gorman's own view. In section V, I explain how Gorman's approach needs the notion of an intentional object, and I argue that Crane's notion of an intentional object is exactly what is needed for an ontologically and metaphysically conservative view of intentionality. The upshot is that we need both intentional objects and satisfaction conditions in a proper theory of intentionality with neither being reducible to the other. In section VI, I end with a brief conclusion.

I. SCHEMATIC INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

For Crane, intentional objects are schematic objects and not substantial objects. Substantial objects are objects that have determinate metaphysical natures. Physical objects provide an example. To call something a physical object is to attribute a determinate nature to it. If an object is a physical object, we know certain facts about it in virtue of it being physical: it is located in space and time and governed by the laws of physics, for example. Abstract objects serve as another example of substantial objects. They are objects that have a unifying nature, and there are necessary conditions an object must meet to be classified as abstract, such as not being located in space. Intentional objects, Crane says, are not like this. There is no necessary condition something must meet in order to be an intentional object (to be the object of a subject's thought, in other words), so intentional objects do not have a unified nature; they are therefore schematic objects and not substantial objects. This idea is a key piece of the solution to avoiding commitment to an implausible ontological and metaphysical view of intentional objects. Here is Crane's reasoning for why his view is metaphysically conservative.

> [I]ntentional objects are not substantial entities, they do not have a nature *as such*. I do allow, of course, that a real thing can be an intentional object: when

> the object of an intentional state exists. The real thing will have an essence or a nature, but it will not have a nature *qua* intentional object. For there is no such thing as the 'nature of intentional objects *qua* intentional objects'; so there cannot be a metaphysical or empirical theory of intentional object. (Crane 2013, 95)

Objects of one's attention are examples of schematic objects.[4] I can attend to a single leaf on a tree, the redness of someone's shirt, or the deteriorating situation in Iraq. I thereby attend to a physical object, a property instantiation and a socio-political phenomenon. These objects of my attention share no uniform metaphysical nature in virtue of being objects of my attention, however. Being an object of attention tells us nothing about the nature of the object of one's attention. Being a physical object, as we saw, does tell us something about the nature of the object. So it goes with schematic and substantial objects: knowing an object is schematic tells us nothing of its nature while knowing an object is substantial does.

Just as we cannot know the metaphysical nature of some object just by knowing that a subject is thinking of it, we cannot know that an object exists just by knowing that a subject is thinking of it. Some intentional objects exist as genuine objects and some do not in the sense that some of the objects thought about by subjects really exist (Barack Obama, for example) while others do not (Pegasus, for example). It is a virtue of Crane's view that it does not commit him to saying that all intentional objects enjoy some level of existence. The view is ontologically and metaphysically conservative because it does not construe intentional objects as objects that have a determinate nature (say, as abstract entities) or as objects that must always exist or subsist in order to be thought of. Merely that some object is thought of tells us nothing about whether the thought-of object actually exists or what the thought-of object's metaphysical nature might be. If we understand intentional objects as schematic objects we are not forced to expand our ontological or metaphysical commitments merely in virtue of adopting intentional objects into our theory of intentionality.

The schematic-substantial distinction is not all we need to understand in order to properly grasp Crane's view. In addition to being schematic objects, Crane also stresses that intentional objects cannot be understood without reference to subjects.

> [S]omething is an intentional object only in so far as it is an object *for* some thinker or some subject. 'Object' in this sense makes sense only relative to 'subject'. Objects are what is given or presented to subjects in intentional states of mind. When a real thing is given or presented to a subject there is nothing about it, considered in itself, which makes it the object of that subject's thought. (Crane 2001b, 342)

One way to put this often overlooked point is as follows: intentional objects are what subjects take their thoughts to be about or to be directed on. We could also say that intentional objects are the objects presented to subjects in having a thought. I should stress here that I am not suggesting that the intentional objects of thoughts get fixed by higher-order beliefs about first-order thoughts. On the contrary, if I think about Barack Obama, for instance, I am immediately aware that Obama is the object of my thought; I do not need to form a second-order belief about my first-order state

to become aware of its intentional object. In fact, there is no gap between what subjects take their thoughts to be about and what they are about. Because there is no such gap, the point may be put in terms of how a thought seems to a subject. Intentional objects are those objects that a thought seems to be about, and because there is no gap between appearance and reality here, what a thought seems to be about to a subject always is what it is about.[5] The seeming fixes the reality in the case of intentional objects.[6] For further help in explicating this notion, we can turn to some work of Galen Strawson. Strawson (2008) employs this notion of taking a thought to be about X as well in explaining why true intentionality requires experience; Strawson holds that fixing the content of intentional states correctly is impossible without appealing to the phenomenal character of experience.[7] Consider the following example he gives.

> There is a wineglass in front of you. You are thinking about it and it alone. How can you do this? What makes it the case that you are thinking about the glass, rather than about the neural activity immediately preceding your thought, or the stimulus patter on your retina, or the glass-reflected light waves a metre away from your eye? (Ibid., 296)

Strawson says that there are two options available for determining the intentional object of the thought in question. It is either what the subject takes his or her thought to be about or it is facts about the subject's behavior not linked to what the subjects take their thoughts to be. What subjects take their thoughts to be about settles the aboutness of thoughts. The behavioral facts by themselves do not drill down to the right level of detail because the behavioral facts that do not appeal to what subjects take their thoughts to be about are consistent with multiple intentional objects.[8]

Given the importance to intentionality of this notion of taking, it would clearly be a mistake to try to understand intentional objects without reference to subjects. One cannot understand what subjects take their thought to be about or what their thoughts seem to be about without keeping the subject in focus. I should stress that grounding intentional objects in the subject's perspective is just as crucial to Crane's notion of intentional objects as the idea that they are schematic as opposed to substantial objects. Though he stresses a similar point, Gorman neglects this crucial aspect of Crane's view, which hampers his criticism. Gorman himself echoes Crane's focus on the subject by stressing that we can understand intentional objects only in reference to intentional states. In a reference to Brentano, he writes, "[t]he expression 'intentional object' does not have meaning on its own. We cannot speak coherently of an intentional object and then raise a further question about whether anyone 'has' it; instead, the expression 'intentional object' has meaning only as part of a larger expression predicable of intentional states, such as 'has such-and-such as its intentional object'" (Gorman 2006, 142). Here Gorman warns against separating intentional objects from intentional states, which is quite similar to Crane's stricture that intentional objects cannot be understood independently of subjects. In fact, the ideas are the same on the assumption that all intentional states require subjects. Trouble ensues when we try to understand the object of an intentional state independently of the respective subject and overall intentional state. There is a tendency in discussions about intentionality to do just this, to separate

intentional objects from subjects and then ask questions about the metaphysical and ontological status of intentional objects while leaving the subject out of the picture. I call this the reification fallacy. Both Crane and Gorman are sensitive to it, but Gorman is not sensitive enough to Crane's idea that we cannot understand intentional objects without subjects. If he were, it would obviate the criticism he levels at Crane below.

> If it makes sense to say things like 'X is an intentional object', and furthermore to add, 'X does not exist', then it will seem natural to ask, 'If X doesn't exist, then what does it do? Subsist, perhaps?' If it makes sense to say things like 'Intentional objects don't have any substantial nature', then it will seem natural to ask, 'Then what do they have instead? A schematic nature?' Such questions will keep arising whenever we say things like 'Intentional objects are such-and-such' or 'Sophie's dog is an intentional object', because such assertions can seem to be statements about something distinct from any intentional state, something that (strangely enough) needn't exist or have a nature. (Ibid., 138)

Seen through the lens of the subject's perspective, the above questions are easily answered. If a subject takes his or her thought to be about an object that does not in fact exist, we need not invent a category of existence for the object because it need not exist solely in virtue of being thought about, nor must we specify its nature just by consider it as an intentional object because the fact that some object is thought of does not fix the metaphysical nature of the referent of the thought should there be one. In short, the metaphysics and ontology of objects are not fixed through intentionality.

II. THE INTENTIONAL OBJECTS OF THOUGHTS AND THE REFERENTS OF THOUGHTS

Aside from neglecting to understand intentional objects through subjects' perspectives and as schematic objects, discussions of intentionality also suffer from running together the intentional object of a thought and the referent of a thought.[9] Often times, of course, our thoughts refer to what we take them to be about, thus the intentional object and referent are the same. I think about President Obama and my thought refers to him.[10] However, there are instances in which the intentional object is not the referent because there is no referent even though there is an intentional object. Suppose someone convinces me that Obama has a twin brother and I think about Obama's twin. My thoughts are about his twin even if they do not refer to him since there is no such twin. In this case, what my thought is about must be fixed by the intentional object and not the referent. In fact, this is how aboutness is to be fixed in all cases. The intentional object of a thought—and not the referent—tells us what the thought is about.

It is a serious mistake to think of the intentional object of a thought as the referent of a thought; if we do, we cannot make sense of non-existent intentional objects, objects of thought that do not exist. All thoughts about non-existents have intentional objects—they are about something—but they all fail to refer to anything in the world (they lack referents, in other words).[11] Here is an example to make the distinction plain. Let us say that I am in the auto repair shop to get my oil changed.

The manager tells me that the man who is doing oil changes today is the very best mechanic he has got. My oil gets changed. On the drive home I notice sunglasses on the passenger seat of my car. I think that the mechanic who serviced my car left his sunglasses in my car.

Suppose, though, that the manager is lying to me about the mechanic. All of the oil changes are done by machines. He merely tells me the story he does because he believes people prefer to think of their oil being changed by actual humans. When I think that the man who serviced my car left his sunglasses in my car, the man who I was told of is the object of my thought. He is the object I take the thought to be about and the thought is about him, even if the thought refers to nothing. If we think of the intentional object as both what the thought is about and what it refers to, then we are unable to say that the thought is both intentional and about a non-existent thing.

Here is an example from Searle, which illustrates how the distinction between intentional objects and referents can get collapsed.

> [I]f Bill admires President Carter, then the Intentional object of his admiration is President Carter, the actual man and not some shadow intermediate entity between Bill and the man. In both the case of speech acts and the case of Intentional states, if there is no object that satisfies the propositional or the representative content, then the speech act and the Intentional state cannot be satisfied. In such cases, just as there is no "referred-to-object" of the speech act, so there is no "Intentional object" of the Intentional state: if nothing satisfies the referential portion of the representative content then the Intentional state does not have an Intentional object. (1983,16–17)

If we construe intentional objects as objects referred to by intentional states, then we must, like Searle, say that thoughts about non-existents do not have intentional objects. If they do not have intentional objects, though, they are not about anything—at least in the sense of 'intentional object' on offer. Searle says that such thoughts maintain their aboutness in virtue of having content that represents non-existent entities. He also posits different senses of 'about': an extensional and intensional-with-an-s sense. How does positing these two senses really help, though?[12] It helps us explain, one might think, how thoughts about non-existents are both about something and about nothing. In the extensional sense of 'about', they are about nothing. In the intensional-with-an-s sense of 'about', they are about something. But what are they about in the intensional-with-an-s sense? Searle seems to say that they are about the objects that the subjects having the thoughts take them to be about.

> In one sense (the intensional-with-an-s), the statement or belief that the King of France is bald is about the King of France, but in that sense it does not follow that there is some object which they are about. (Ibid., 17)

Searle cannot actually accommodate his own intuition that there is a sense in which thoughts about the King of France are about the King of France because he construes intentional objects as referred-to-objects or referents. Crane's own view, however, can make sense of the above quote. When a subject thinks about the King of France, then the subject takes the thought to be about the King of France. There is no King

of France, so the thought refers to nothing but maintains its aboutness in spite of the reference failure. The solution is not to posit an ambiguity in 'about' as Searle does, but to see that there is a pervasive ambiguity in how 'intentional object' gets used. Sometimes it is construed as the object the subject takes the thought to be about, sometimes as the referent of the thought. I by no means endorse this dual use of 'intentional object.' The term has only one proper sense, meaning the object that is presented to the subject in thought, the object the subject takes the thought to be about, or the object that the thought seems to be about from the subject's point of view. Recognizing the potential to invoke both senses helps us avoid confusion that often arises from bypassing the subject's perspective and thinking of intentional objects simply as the referents of thoughts.

III. GORMAN'S CRITICISM OF SCHEMATIC INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

We are now in a position to understand and evaluate Gorman's criticism that Crane's view is incomplete. He says that the schematic-substantial distinction helps us understand what intentional objects are not, but it falls short of explaining how the account "permits intentional states to have non-existent objects" (138). Gorman claims that this idea of schematic intentional objects is problematic when applied to intentional states about non-existents, for there is no substantial object for these states to be directed on. Here is Gorman's summary of the objection.

> [W]hen Crane applies substantial-schematic distinction to intentional objects and says, for example, that to be an intentional object is 'to be that upon which the mind is directed when in an intentional state' (Crane 2001a: 17), we can see what he means by saying that this is a non-substantial use of the word 'object', but we cannot see how this applies to a case in which there is nothing there for the mind to be directed upon. The point is not that Crane should give us an ontology of intentional objects as such—that sort of approach is ruled out by his using 'object' in the schematic sense. The point instead is that he should explain how understanding intentional objects in the way that he recommends permits intentional states to have non-existing objects. And this he does not do. (138)

We have a perfectly clear idea, Gorman argues, of understanding how a real boat could become a schematic intentional object. There is a substantial object in the world that can play the role of intentional object; there is a substantial object that can become the focus of a subject's mind. However, if this is how one makes sense of merely schematic objects, we cannot make sense of them if there is no substantial object to play the role of schematic object. So, the objection is that we cannot properly understand the idea of a schematic objects applied to non-existent entities. Gorman's argument can be represented as follows.

(1) A mental state is intentional only if it has an intentional object.

(2) Intentional objects play a necessary role in determining the content of intentional states.[13]

(3) We cannot understand a particular intentional object without first understanding its substantial counterpart in the world.

(4) Non-existent intentional objects have no substantial counterpart in the world.

(5) So, we cannot understand non-existent intentional objects. [from 3,4]

(6) So, we cannot understand how intentional states about non-existents can have intentional content. [from 1,2, and 5].

If sound, the argument is clearly troubling for Crane, as he is committed to (1) and (2). (4) is surely true. If (3) is true, then it appears Crane must accept the conclusion. And if we cannot even understand non-existent schematic intentional objects, then it is a mistake to think we can press this notion of schematic intentional objects into service to bring some clarity to thinking about non-existents.

The distinctions discussed in the first two sections help us see that understanding a particular schematic object does not require the existence of a corresponding particular substantial object.[14] The distinctions, in other words, help us to see that (3) in Gorman's argument is false. Explaining how there could be a thought with an intentional object that fails to exist as a referent amounts to explaining how there could be instances of subjects taking their thoughts to be about some object when that object does not exist. We have a clear idea of subjects taking their thoughts to be about or directed upon something. If there is nothing in the world to which a thought refers, then that does not affect our ability to understand that the subject still takes the thought to be about something, which thereby makes the thought intentional. Everyone has directly experienced the phenomenon of taking a thought to be about something. All conscious *intentional* states constitute such experiences. Our ability to understand particular intentional objects is not dependent on locating particular substantial objects in the world that fit these intentional objects. If there is a conceptual dependence it is this. Our understanding of the general notion of an intentional object is dependent on the notion of a subject's perspective on the world. Getting a grip on the notion of a particular schematic object requires getting a grip on the notion of a subject taking his or her thought to be about an object. To understand this, the object that the subject takes the thought to be about need not exist.

We might also be puzzled about Crane's notion of an intentional object if we think of intentional objects as referents of thoughts. As I noted earlier, we cannot understand thoughts about non-existent objects if we take intentional objects to be the referents of thoughts because we cannot understand the idea of an object that both exists (in virtue of being a relatum) and does not exist (in virtue of being non-existent) at the same time. In short, Gorman's charge that we cannot understand Crane's notion of intentional objects applied to non-existents—because in such thoughts there is nothing for the mind to be directed on—fails to track properly the distinction between intentional objects and referents and the role that the subject plays in grounding intentional objects. Keeping these things in focus helps us to see that (3) is false.

IV. GORMAN'S SATISFACTION-CONDITION APPROACH

Because Crane's notion of schematic intentional objects is problematic, Gorman thinks that we should not employ it in a theory of intentionality. We can get by perfectly fine, he thinks, by talking about the satisfaction conditions of intentional states. To talk about intentional objects, his idea runs, is really to talk about just intentional states themselves.

> [A] statement of the form '*a* is the intentional object of *b*'s intentional state' is a statement about *b*'s intentional state. Is there a general formula for determining what a statement is about? Statements are truth-claims, and as such they have truth-conditions. A given statement is about whatever it is that must exist (or not exist) to make the statement be true. The statement that Sophie is tall is about Sophie because Sophie's existence is among its truth-conditions; the statement that Sophie is taller than Teresa is about both Sophie and Teresa because its truth-conditions include the existence of both of them. (Gorman 2006, 140)

Intentional objects are reducible to satisfaction conditions to Gorman; we do not, he thinks, need an irreducible notion of intentional objects. Because all the work of determining content can be done by satisfaction conditions, we do not need intentional objects in our toolkit. Of course, I agree with Gorman that to make sense of the intentional content of many intentional states, we need the notion of satisfaction conditions.[15] If I believe that the shop's best mechanic left his sunglasses in my car, then we cannot understand the content of the thought by merely understanding that the shop's best mechanic is the intentional object of my thought. The content is understood only when we understand that my belief is true if and only if the shop's best mechanic left his sunglasses in my car. If I have a desire to return the sunglasses to the shop's best mechanic, then to understand the content of that desire we need to understand that the desire is satisfied if and only if I return the glasses to the shop's best mechanic.[16] What Gorman and I disagree about is whether intentional objects can be reduced to satisfaction conditions. Like Crane, I think that intentional objects are irreducible because they are needed to capture the subject's perspective on the world.[17] I now turn to arguing for the irreducibility and indispensability of intentional objects.

V. THE NEED FOR BOTH SATISFACTION CONDITIONS AND INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

So far it may seem that even if Gorman's objection to schematic intentional objects fails, his more minimalistic approach to intentionality is preferable. It may seem that the best thing to do with intentional objects is dispense with them, given the various problems to which they can seem to give rise. However, Gorman overlooks the fact that we must consider the subject's perspective in order to get the satisfaction conditions of propositional intentional states right. Intentional objects are needed to capture the subject's perspective and so needed to fix the satisfaction conditions of propositional intentional states correctly. But to play this role they must be irreducible to satisfaction conditions.

Let us revisit the mechanic example to see this point. On Gorman's view the content of my belief that the shop's best mechanic left his sunglasses in my car can be understood by understanding that the belief is true if and only if the shop's best mechanic left his sunglasses in my car. The thought is about the mechanic. We could say that he is the intentional object, but all this means for Gorman is that the shop's best mechanic is included in the truth conditions of the belief. So, talk about intentional objects is really just talk about the satisfaction conditions of intentional states. And this does not raise any of the vexing questions that would be raised if we held that he is the intentional object of the thought.

This approach takes the fixing of satisfaction conditions to be an unproblematic affair while it is not. We cannot reduce intentional objects to satisfaction conditions because intentional objects need to be independent from satisfaction conditions if they are to capture the subject's perspective. To see this, suppose we try to articulate the truth conditions of my belief about the mechanic without consideration for what I take the thought to be about (the belief's intentional object). One wonders how we would proceed. Without reference to the subject's perspective, we would have to try to fix the satisfaction conditions based on publicly observable data consisting largely of behavior facts about me. Even if we had mounds of such data, we would not be able to fix the truth conditions of my belief correctly unless we first understand what I take my thought to be about. To make the point vivid, one could suppose that all the events regarding my oil change have been filmed. You watch and listen to my interaction with the manager, you see me notice the sunglasses on the passenger seat, and you watch all the action in between. As you see me look at the sunglasses for the first time, you wonder: what is the content of his belief? Any number of sentences would seem equally good candidates for expressing the belief's truth conditions when only the publicly observable data is taken into consideration. Here are just three:

(7) The intentional content of my belief is true if and only if one of the mechanics from the repair shop left his or her sunglasses in my car.

(8) The intentional content of my belief is true if and only if the sunglasses were left in the car by someone who is not employed by the auto repair shop.

(9) The intentional content of my belief is true if and only if the manager from the repair shop left his sunglasses in my car.

None of these gets the truth conditions of my belief right. In the example, I believe that the shop's best mechanic left his sunglasses in my car. (7) is the closest, but the content that the truth conditions of (7) specifies does not concern a particular individual. And I believe that the shop's best mechanic—obviously someone I take to be a particular individual—left his sunglasses in my car. Gorman would clearly want to say that the belief is true if and only if the shop's best mechanic left his glasses in my car, but without the notion of an intentional object, the notion of what I take my thought to be about, there is no way for him to say that the correct truth conditions are better than the ones expressed in (7)–(9) because we lose the subject's perspective on the world when intentional objects—at least in the

sense on offer—drop out. The moral here is that the project of fixing intentional content by way of satisfaction conditions cannot proceed without first considering the intentional object(s) of a subject's intentional states, which ground the fixing of content in a given subject's perspective. We need to know that my mind is directed on a particular mechanic, one who I believe to be the shop's best, in order to get the content of my belief right. If we do not understand intentional objects as independent of the satisfaction conditions, we cannot get the truth conditions of the belief right.

So far I have discussed the role of intentional objects and satisfaction conditions in a theory of intentionality. Philosophers often use the term 'aspectual shape' in discussions of intentionality to capture the idea that objects are always presented to subjects in certain ways, under some aspect or other. I offer a brief word now about how this notion fits into my account. On my view, because intentional objects are the objects subjects take their thoughts to be about, all such takings will have an aspectual shape, that is, in thinking about an object, a subject always thinks about it in some particular way or other. Even though all instances of a subject taking his or her thought to be about an object will have aspectual shape, it may be useful, at points, to distinguish between the intentional object of a thought and its aspectual shape. Suppose I believe that Barack Obama was a good community organizer and that he is also a good president. Both beliefs have the same intentional object (Obama), but in the respective thoughts I think of Obama in different ways—as a community organizer and as a president. So, these beliefs have the same intentional object, though I think of the same object in different ways. We should remember, though, that in taking a thought to be about an object, a subject always thinks of the object under some aspect or other.

Some think of aspectual shape as the aspect under which the *referent* of the thought is presented. However, we cannot understand aspectual shape this way on my view, because the referent of a thought is not always identical with its intentional object. Consider an example. Suppose I am ignorant of the fact that the Morning Star is the Evening Star. On my view of intentional objects, when I take my thought to be about the Morning Star in thinking that the Morning Star is bright, then the Morning Star is the intentional object of my thought. When I take my thought to be about the Evening Star in thinking that the Evening Star is bright, then the Evening Star is the intentional object of my thought. The thoughts would have distinct intentional objects because I take the thoughts to be about distinct objects, as I am unaware that both stars are really the planet Venus, respectively seen in the morning and at night. To this, someone might think that we have two thoughts that share the same intentional object (Venus) while diverging in terms of their aspectual shape, the analysis being that Venus is presented to me under different aspects. However, this cannot be the analysis on my view because it fails to ground intentional objects in the subject's perspective. Of course, both the thoughts described above *refer* to Venus, but because the subject is not aware of this fact, the thoughts have distinct intentional objects—even if the referent of each thought is the same. It would be a mistake to say that Venus is the intentional object of my thought since I am not aware that the Morning Star and the Evening Star are identical to Venus.[18]

I have not said anything about intentional mode here since I have been focused solely on intentional content. The mode of an intentional state is the attitude the subject has toward the content. Two states can have the same intentional content even if the mode is different. I believe that there is beer in the fridge and I desire that there is beer in the fridge. Intentional modes are obviously factors in distinguishing *intentional states*, but I do not focus on them here because my focus is on *intentional content* and intentional mode does not determine intentional content.

VI. CONCLUSION

A guiding idea in Gorman's view is that "to talk about the object of an intentional state is really to talk about the intentional state itself" (2006, 135). In a sense, Crane's view can say the same thing: talking about the intentional object of an intentional state is to talk about the content of that intentional state. In describing the intentional object of a thought, one is describing (at least a portion of) its intentional content.[19] It is a mistake, though, to think that this fact means intentional objects are reducible to intentional states. As I have argued, understanding the intentional object of a thought is the first step in properly understanding the intentional content of a thought. We must first understand what a subject takes a thought to be about in order to get the truth conditions right.

Both Crane and Gorman are interested in defending content internalism, the view that a subject's having an intentional state with some particular intentional content does not instantiate any extrinsic or relational properties. The environment need not be certain ways, in other words, for an individual to have a thought with a specific content.[20] If one holds that intentional objects are the referents of thoughts, then it will be hard to make sense of content internalism, since it seems that the referent, clearly an external feature of the subject's environment, must be a certain way for the thought in question to be the thought it is. On such an understanding of intentional objects, the aboutness relation is an ordinary sort of relation like two things being next to each other in space in that it requires two relata for the relation to be realized. On the view I am defending—and, it seems to me, any plausible version of content internalism—aboutness cannot be construed as an ordinary relation. When a subject takes his thought to be about some object, then he is not related to that object in the way he is spatially related to everyday objects in his environment. My preference is for dropping talk of an intentional relation here all together because of the normal requirement that in a relationship between two objects, both relata must exist. To even ask how a subject is related to an intentional object is to begin the process of reifying the intentional object and divorcing it from the subject for the questioning posits an intentional object and a subject as separate and then asks how they are connected. The idea I have been stressing in this paper is that an intentional object is what a subject takes his or her thought to be about. The taking fixes the intentional object once and for all. To talk about the nature of the relation between subjects and intentional objects presupposes that intentional objects enjoy some existence independent of subjects and this move commits the reification fallacy.

Dropping talk of an intentional relation may have a whiff of solipsism. But there is really no such worry. There is still an external world that our intentional states are related to if content internalism is true. Uriah Kriegel (2008) says that the way our thoughts connect to the world is in virtue of being true or false, being satisfied or unsatisfied and veridical or non-veridical and not in virtue of having referents as their intentional objects. I agree. There is obviously much more to say here, but it is enough to note at this point that bearing an extensional relation to parts of the world is not the only option for spelling out how thought links up with the world.[21]

It is true that discussions of intentional objects and non-existents often end in philosophers making extravagant metaphysical and ontological claims. I have argued that we need the notion of an intentional object and that there is one to be had that involved no metaphysical or ontological extravagance. While Gorman gets some things right, he misses the crucial role intentional objects have in capturing the subject's perspective on the world. Commitment to such objects should not worry us because it is merely commitment to the idea that there are things subjects take their thoughts to be about—commitment to no more than a certain type of experience. Understanding the notion of an intentional object on offer involves keeping in mind three things: the fact that intentional objects have no unifying metaphysical natures, the fact that intentional objects and referents come apart in cases of non-existents, and the need to keep the subject in focus so as to avoid the reification fallacy.[22]

ENDNOTES

1. See Crane 2001a, 2001b, and 2013.

2. I understand 'intentional object' and 'object of thought' as synonymous in this paper.

3. In this paper I do not wish to take a stand on the debate about propositionalism, the thesis that all intentional states are propositional attitudes, states in which a thinker is related to a proposition. I agree with Gorman that satisfaction conditions are needed to make sense of propositional attitudes, intentional states whose content expresses a proposition, but this does not commit me to the idea that satisfaction conditions are needed to make sense of all intentional states, since it is questionable whether the content of all intentional states is best thought of as propositional. For what it is worth, Crane (2013) rejects propositionalism.

4. This is Crane's own example. He also uses the example of grammatical objects to explicate intentional objects.

5. The notion of an intentional object on my view is a phenomenological notion as it is grounded in how the objects of thought seem to subjects.

6. This needs to be qualified a bit because it may seem that subjects can never be mistaken in terms of what their thoughts are about. There is a sense in which subjects are infallible about what their thoughts are about and a sense in which they are fallible. Subjects might be mistaken about how to describe what their thoughts are about. If I am fixing a table and I think to myself, I need an adjustable wrench to finish the job, my thought is about adjustable wrenches (in addition to being about the table and about the job of fixing at hand). However, I might misspeak and ask my helper to hand me an Allen wrench and thereby misdescribe my intentional object. I cannot be mistaken about what I take the thought to be about: an

adjustable wrench. I can be mistaken in my description of one of the objects of the thought as the example shows.

7. Strawson holds that what a subject takes a thought to be about is fixed by the taking and "causal context." So, taking is not sufficient for determining content on his view, but it is necessary. Without working out the details, it is enough to say that my account appeals just to taking when it comes to fixing the intentional object of an intentional state. Knowing what a subject takes his or her intentional state to be about is sufficient in my view for knowing the intentional object of the intentional state.

8. Behavioral facts can help in so far as they are solid evidence of what a subject takes his or her thought to be about. For example, if someone asserts that the intentional object of his or her thought is the wine glass, then we have some behavioral evidence for what the subject takes his or her thought to be about. Ultimately, though, the intentional object is fixed by what the subject takes his or her thought to be about even if some evidence for the object of the taking could be based on behavior.

9. This common conflation is by no means seen only in Gorman's work. As I suggested earlier, he is quite sensitive to the need to understand intentional objects with reference to intentional states. He just fails to see Crane's similar sensitivity, which causes a misunderstanding of Crane's view on his part. The point about the need to distinguish intentional objects and referents of thoughts is a general one and made here to bring this important distinction out into the open, as it is important to later points.

10. I speak of the referents of thoughts. I could have easily put things in terms of objects that satisfy certain thoughts. If my thought is about Pegasus, Pegasus is the intentional object, but the thought has no referent nor is it true of, or satisfied by, any object in the world.

11. Some may think that there is a tension in the ideas that we need intentional objects in our theory of intentionality and that intentional objects need not exist, a worry about Crane's view expressed in Voltolini 2006. If a theory of intentionality countenances intentional objects, then it is incoherent for the same theory to hold that intentional objects do not exist. The tension here dissolves when we understand that an intentional object is just what a subject takes a thought to be about. We must countenance such takings in our theory, but this seems no more extravagant than including experiences as part of our ontology. If one commits the reification fallacy, and thinks of intentional objects as separate from subjects, then the tension remains, for one will worry over the metaphysics of these intentional objects and how it is that we can stand in a genuine relation to such objects. It is a virtue of my interpretation of Crane's notion of an intentional object that it helps us avoid the reification fallacy and see that this apparent tension is really illusory.

12. See Crane 2013 for more criticism of Searle 1983 on the ambiguity of 'about.'

13. This does not say that intentional objects are sufficient for determining content. I discuss the fact that they are not in sections IV and V.

14. It may be the case that in general the notion of a schematic object requires that we understand the notion of a substantial object. Gorman's charge does not rely on this point, though. His worry is that on Crane's view we cannot understand a *particular* non-existent intentional object if there is no substantial object in the world for the subject's mind to be directed on.

15. We certainly need these notions, in addition to the notion of an intentional object, to make sense of intentional states whose content is propositional. There may be some intentional states for which we do not need these notions, but we do need them for intentional states

with propositional content. My discussion of the need for satisfaction conditions focuses on propositional intentional states and not non-propositional states.

16. The fact that the mechanic does not exist prevents the above belief from being true and it prevents my desire from being satisfied.

17. See chapter 2 in Crane 2001a.

18. If however I know that Venus is identical to the Morning Star and the Evening Star, then the thoughts share the same intentional object. And I may think of this object under different aspects, as the planet I saw this morning before the Sun rose or as the planet that is referenced in Frege's famous example. The intentional objects in such a case would be the same while the aspectual shape would differ.

19. If the intentional state is propositional, then talk of the intentional object will amount to talk about just part of the content. If I believe Obama is president, then talking about the intentional object of my thought is talk that begins to cash out my intentional content, but we still need to appeal to satisfaction conditions to fully express the intentional content of the thought. However, if the state is not propositional, as in a thought about just Obama, then talk of the intentional object of the state would be talk about all of the state's content.

20. This way of construing internalism leaves it open whether a shared environment may be a necessary condition on the general ability for subjects to have thoughts at all. Content internalism does not concern the necessary conditions on creatures having thoughts; it is a view about particular intentional contents and their lack of dependence on features in a subject's external environment.

21. Kriegel, like Gorman, rejects that intentional objects have a role to play in intentionality. Kriegel articulates (though as of Kriegel 2011 does not completely endorse) adverbialism about intentionality primarily to avoid the problem of making sense of thoughts about non-existents. Instead of thinking of intentionality as the mind's direction upon objects, we should think of intentional states as ways of thinking. I do not think about Pegasus. I think Pegasus-wise. The main worry I have about this view is that it cannot replace the act-object model of intentionality it seeks to replace because the intelligibility of the adverbialist re-descriptions of intentional states are parasitic on the act-object model of intentionality. See Woodling 2016 for detailed criticism.

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